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AUTHOR Zelazek, John R.; Lamson, Sharon
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a course taken by elementary student teachers at Central Missouri State University, with particular emphasis on the action research projects that are a part of the course requirements. The intent of the course and the action research is to foster in the student teachers reflective decision making in their own classrooms. Components of the course and of the action research assignment are outlined. The paper concludes with a list of approximately 70 action research topics that were researched in 1990-1991. (IAH)

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ACTION RESEARCH AND THE STUDENT TEACHER: A FRAMEWORK FOR PROBLEM-SOLVING AND REFLECTIVE THINKING

by

Dr. John R. Zelazek and Dr. Sharon Lamson

Central Missouri State University
Warrensburg, Missouri 64093
(816) 543-4235

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Action research is a practical and directly relevant pursuit reflecting the development of new approaches to solve problems with direct applications in actual situations within the student teacher's world. The subjects of the research are the classroom students, staff and others with whom the student teacher is primarily involved. Action research provides an orderly framework for problem-solving and new assimilation of developments that are superior to the impressionistic, fragmentary approaches that otherwise typify developments in education. It is also empirical in the sense that it relies on actual observations and behavioral data, and does not fall back on subjective opinions of people based only on their past experience. Action research is flexible and adaptive, allowing changes during the trial period and sacrificing control in favor of responsiveness in experimentation and innovation.

The move towards action research projects by student teachers is a "New Direction" in student teaching field experience, and is a means to strive for excellence and accountability within the student teaching semester and the full development of reflective decision making in teachers.

In student teaching, it is important that each student make rational choices between alternative practices, validate the effectiveness of those practices, and to build a stable foundation of effective practices as a safeguard against ineffective teaching. This prepares them for their own classroom and the independence of a practicing professional. Today's practitioners are expected to demonstrate reflective teaching strategies through a conscientious effort to reflect on what one does in the classroom, identifying effective practices and then implementing positive change strategies. This method means that teachers continually assess, reflect and make decisions on everyday classroom experiences.

With this philosophical premise, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Central Missouri State University, Warrensburg, Missouri, set out to design an experience for student teachers in the elementary school that would prepare them for reflective decision making in their own classrooms. This experience is part of the course EdCI 4150 that elementary student teachers take while they are out in the public schools. This seminar course fosters, during the student teaching experience, professional reflection through a structured analysis and synthesis by the students of the progress of the process of becoming a teacher. At the end of this experience and as a result of the action research projects, the students should be able to do the following:

1. Identify concerns encountered during teaching and develop alternative course of action.

2. Analyze instruction and/or classroom events and seek to improve instruction through the development of a positive problem-solving style.

3. Demonstrate a working knowledge of action research methodology including the construction and design of a workable action research project.

4. Communicate knowledge and experience gained from the reflective thinking/positive problem-solving approach to their peers and colleagues.

I. Purpose of the course

This seminar fosters, during the capstone student teaching experience, professional reflection through a structured analysis and synthesis by the students of their progress in the process of becoming a teacher and prepares a linkage to the students' induction process during the first two years of full-time employment. It also allows for an update on professional topics emerging late in the students' preparation or of particular timeliness for this final stage of the preservice education program.

II. Course Objectives

The student will be able to:

1. Identify concerns encountered during student teaching and develop alternative courses of action.

2. Develop an awareness of the support and induction programs districts have for first and second year teachers as required by the Missouri Excellence in Education Act of 1985 and their relationship to continued certification.

3. Evaluate career progress to date while identifying career goals and producing professional development plans.

4. Demonstrate a working knowledge of action research methodology including the construction and design of a workable action research project.

5. Analyze instruction and/or classroom events and seek to find improvements through the development of an action research project.

6. Demonstrate competency in writing mechanics by using correct grammar and appropriate style (APA writing style) in the development of a written report of action research.

7. Develop a knowledge of late-emerging topics or topics particularly timely to student teaching.

III. Course Content Outline

Since this seminar will be structured differently from the traditional format of most college courses, the objectives and the procedures will provide the framework for the course. The content will include as ongoing centerpieces the topics of professional development plans and action research. Beyond these topics, the content will vary from semester to semester depending on the cohort make-up, catalog adjustments, accreditation agenda, professional research developments, and teacher-oriented state mandates.

IV. Course Procedures

This course is team taught by all department members. Large group presentations by faculty are followed by individual sessions with university supervisors and department faculty. Presentations by professional practitioners are integrated into the instruction.

V. Course Assignments

A. Professional Development Plan. Each student will develop a professional development plan which will address the first two years of their teaching career. It will be assessed by their university supervisor based on content, organization, and mechanics.

B. Action Research Project. The project will be developed by the student teacher working with her/his assigned Curriculum and Instruction Department faculty member.

SUMMATIVE SEMINAR

Action Research Assignment

The Summative Seminar requires students to engage in action research during their student teaching assignment. In this packet you will find the objectives, required time frame and assessment instrument for the assignment. You will also find a description of action research, its characteristics and purpose, sequential steps to action research and a sample research project. These topics should facilitate your completion of this important component of quality teaching.

COURSE OBJECTIVES MET BY THIS ASSIGNMENT:

1. The student will demonstrate a working knowledge of action research methodology including the construction and design of a workable research project.

2. The student will analyze instruction and/or classroom events and seek to solve problems through the development of an action research project.

3. The student will demonstrate competency in writing mechanics by using correct grammar and appropriate style (APA writing style) in the development of a written report of action research.

OVERVIEW OF THE ASSIGNMENT:

Each student will conduct Action Research which addresses a specific problem related to his/her classroom situation. This assignment is designed to help the student teacher become a problem solver through the utilization of proper (and logical) steps.

The Action Research Report will be designed by the student teacher under the supervision of a Curriculum and Instruction faculty member mentor. The proposal for the research and the finished report will be assessed by this faculty member based on content, construction, methodology and writing mechanics. This assignment will be completed by the final student teacher conference.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTION RESEARCH:

1. Action research is a practical and directly relevant pursuit reflecting the development of new approaches to solve problems with direct applications in actual situations within the educator's world. The subjects are the classroom students, staff and others with whom the student is primarily involved.

2. Action Research provides an orderly framework for problem-solving and new developments that are superior to the impressionistic, fragmentary approach that otherwise typifies developments in education. It is also empirical in the sense that it relies on actual observations and behavioral data, and does not fall back on subjective opinions of people based on their past experience.

3. Action Research is flexible and adaptive, allowing changes during the trial period and sacrificing control in favor of responsiveness in experimentation and innovation.

4. Action research is systematic with findings useful within the practical dimensions of a specific situation.

COMPLETING THE ASSIGNMENT:

The steps listed below provide a framework for conducting action research:

1. Observe specific educational situation.

2. Define the problem or set the goal. What is it that needs improvement or that might be developed as a new skill or solution?

3. Consider possible solutions. Develop a hypothesis. Formulate a testable hypothesis or strategy in clear, specific and measurable language.

4. Conduct a limited review of the literature to learn whether others have met similar problems or attempted to achieve related objectives. How did they proceed?

5. Develop procedures and conditions. What are the particular things you will do in an attempt to test your hypothesis or meet your objectives?

6. Establish evaluation criteria, measurement techniques, and other means of acquiring useful feedback.

7. Analyze the data and evaluate the outcomes. What has been found once the research has been conducted?

8. Provide conclusions and recommendations regarding the original hypothesis.

The following topics were researched during the 1990-91 school year.

ACTION RESEARCH TOPICS 1990-1991

THE EFFECTS OF POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT ON THE MOTIVATION OF FIRST GRADE STUDENTS

THE EFFECT OF STRUCTURED SPELLING ACTIVITIES ON POST TEST SCORES OF FOURTH GRADERS PARTICIPATING IN A TEST-STUDY-TEST SPELLING PROGRAM

THE EFFECT OF POSITIVE GOAL-ORIENTED REINFORCEMENT ON CONTROLLING A BEHAVIOR DISORDER STUDENT

USING CONTRACTS AS A MANAGEMENT STRATEGY IN A SECOND GRADE CLASSROOM

THE EFFECT OF POSITIVE FEEDBACK ON COMPLETED ON-TIME ASSIGNMENTS OF FIFTH AND SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS

THE EFFECT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION, COMPUTER USAGE AND A TOKEN ECONOMY WITH FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS

THE EFFECTS OF A LISTENING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ON THE LISTENING SKILLS OF FOURTH GRADERS
WHOLE LANGUAGE: A SUCCESSFUL APPROACH

MASTERY LEARNING: IS RETEACHING THE ANSWER

THE EFFECT OF ESTABLISHING GOALS AND TANGIBLE REWARDS IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM

SELECTED DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES: HANDLING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR WITHIN AN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

THE EFFECT OF EXTRINSIC REWARDS VERSUS INTRINSIC REWARDS IN A MID-WESTERN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

THE EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN THE MATH CURRICULUM

A COMPARISON BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' ATTITUDES IN THE STUDY OF NUTRITION

THE EFFECT OF POSITIVE TEACHER INFLUENCE AND STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY ON FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS' USE OF FORCE AND VERBAL ABUSE WITH PEERS

A COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT BETWEEN SAME AND MIXED GENDER GROUPS

THE EFFECT OF DEPARTMENTALIZATION ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS

CAN A STANDARDIZED TEST MEASURE MASTERY IN THE WHOLE LANGUAGE READING PROGRAM "SUCCESS IN READING AND WRITING"

THE EFFECTS OF BREAKFAST ON CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

THE EFFECT OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN A SECOND GRADE CLASSROOM

THE EFFECT OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON READING GRADES

THE EFFECT OF A STRUCTURED ENVIRONMENT ON THE BEHAVIOR OF A CHILD WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

THE EFFECT OF ONE-TO-ONE INSTRUCTION ON SPELLING ACHIEVEMENT OF A THIRD GRADE STUDENT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DESK ORGANIZATION AND WORK QUALITY

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMPETITION AND PERFORMANCE LEVELS OF FIRST GRADE STUDENTS IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL

THE EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING THROUGH THE ARRANGEMENT OF DESKS

THE EFFECTS OF GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS IN SOCIAL STUDIES ON PERFORMANCE SCORES OF THIRD GRADERS

THE EFFECTS OF BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION ON A STUDENT WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

THE EFFECT OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON THE LEARNING OF VERB CONJUGATION BY THE COOPERATIVE LEARNING APPROACH

THE EFFECTS OF CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENT ON BEHAVIOR AND ATTENTION SPAN OF FIRST GRADE STUDENTS

THE EFFECTS OF CREATIVE WRITING IN THE CLASSROOM ON INNER CITY STUDENTS

THE EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN SPELLING

THE EFFECTS OF MULTISENSORY, REINFORCEMENT SPELLING ACTIVITIES ON SPELLING TEST SCORES

THE EFFECTS OF A FORMAL MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE ON TURNING IN COMPLETED MATH ASSIGNMENTS ON TIME

THE EFFECTS OF LEARNING THROUGH SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION TO PREVENT RETENTION

THE EFFECTS OF SELF-ESTEEM LESSONS ON STUDENTS AT A MIDWESTERN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

THE EFFECT OF COOPERATIVE SPELLING GROUPS ON THE PERFORMANCE SCORES OF THIRD GRADERS

THE EFFECT OF STUDENT LEARNING STYLES ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN MATHEMATICS

THE EFFECT OF EXTRINSIC REWARD ON STUDENTS WITH LOW MOTIVATION AND ON-TIME ASSIGNMENTS

CAN'T READ YOUR WRITING

REDUCTION OF CLASSROOM INTERRUPTIONS THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF LEARNING CENTERS

THE EFFECTS OF BASE TEN MANIPULATIVES ON THE LEARNING OF LONG DIVISION OF FIFTH GRADERS

THE EFFECT OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES: LOWERING CLASSROOM NOISE LEVELS AND RAISING ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS IN MATH

THE EFFECT OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING VERSUS INDEPENDENT LEARNING IN ELEMENTARY SPELLING

THE EFFECT OF REINFORCEMENT ON TRANSITION IN A SECOND GRADE CLASSROOM

THE EFFECT OF CANDY AS A POSITIVE REINFORCER IN A THIRD GRADE CLASSROOM

THE EFFECT OF ACTIVE BOOK REPORTS UPON STUDENTS INTEREST IN READING

THE EFFECT OF VARIED INSTRUCTION IN AREA AND PERIMETER ON THE ACHIEVEMENT OF FIFTH-GRADERS

THE EFFECT OF MIRROR CARDS ON LETTER AND NUMERAL REVERSAL

THE EFFECTS OF ROOM ARRANGEMENT ON THE CLASSROOM RESPONSE OF SECOND GRADERS

THE EFFECTS OF INSTRUCTION TIME THROUGH SEATING ARRANGEMENTS OF FIRST GRADE STUDENTS

THE EFFECTS OF WEATHER ELEMENTS ON CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR OF FIRST-GRADE STUDENTS

THE EFFECTS OF BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION ON A STUDENT WHO THRIVES ON ATTENTION

THE EFFECTS OF TIME ON TASK THROUGH THE ARRANGEMENT OF DESKS

THE EFFECTS OF TIME-ON-TASK THROUGH THE USE OF POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

THE EFFECTS OF BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION WITH POSITIVE REWARDS ON A STUDENT TO INCREASE TIME-ON-TASK

THE EFFECT OF TEST REVIEW GAMES ON SOCIAL STUDIES TEST SCORES OF SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS

THE EFFECTS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH CLASSROOM TACTICS ALTERING THE SELF-CONCEPT

THE EFFECTS OF DESK ARRANGEMENTS ON THE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS OF SECOND GRADE STUDENTS

HANDS-ON SCIENCE AND THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF SECOND GRADERS

THE EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON READING COMPREHENSION AND SOCIAL SKILLS

THE RELATIONSHIP OF SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND SEATING ASSIGNMENTS OF SECOND GRADERS WITH RESPECT TO GENDER

THE EFFECT OF GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS ON THE SEQUENCING ABILITIES OF FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS

THE EFFECT OF AN EXTERNAL REWARD SYSTEM ON HOMEWORK RETURN RATE OF THIRD GRADERS

THE EFFECT OF WINDOWS ON THE BEHAVIOR OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

DETERMINING READING INTERESTS OF AND MOTIVATING THE FIFTH GRADE READER

THE EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING AT AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

THE EFFECTS OF AN INCENTIVE PROGRAM ON THE QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF COMPLETED HOMEWORK

THE EFFECTS OF WEATHER CHANGES ON STUDENT BEHAVIOR

THE EFFECTS OF BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES ON A SECOND GRADE STUDENT

THE EFFECTS OF TOUCHING TO PREVENT DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

THE EFFECTS OF ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL GROUPING ON SPELLING SCORES OF SECOND GRADE STUDENTS

THE EFFECT OF MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES ON THE SEATWORK OF THE AT-RISK STUDENT

THE EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING THROUGH SOCIAL INTERACTION IN SEATING PATTERNS

THE EFFECTS OF LEARNING THROUGH THE USE OF COMPUTER AIDED INSTRUCTION

THE EFFECTS OF POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT ON TIME ON TASK

THE EFFECT OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF FIFTH STUDENTS

THE EFFECTS OF MICROCOMPUTERS ON THE LANGUAGE TEST SCORES OF FIFTH AND SIXTH GRADERS

THE EFFECTS OF RANDOM SELECTION ON STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN CLASS DISCUSSION

THE EFFECT OF DRILL AND PRACTICE AND POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT ON STUDENT HANDWRITING LEGIBILITY

THE EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS TO FIRST GRADE STUDENTS

THE EFFECTS OF SEATING ARRANGEMENTS WITH ONE THIRD GRADE STUDENT'S ABILITY TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS DURING EDUCATIONAL INSTRUCTION

USING A STICKER CHART CONTRACT TO IMPROVE UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIORS ASSOCIATED WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

A MORE SUCCESSFUL APPROACH TO MAKEUP WORK

THE EFFECTS OF TEACHER'S EXPECTATIONS ON STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

A COMPARISON OF SIXTH AND SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS' ABILITY TO ORDER RELATED ITEMS BY SIZE IN LIFE SCIENCE

THE EFFECT OF A WRITING EXPERIENCE ON THE SPELLING OF FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS

THE EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON PERFORMANCE SCORES IN READING